

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

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TAGS: PFOR, EGY, SY

SUBJECT: EGYPTIAN REPORT OF ATTEMPTED COUP IN SYRIA

REF: CAIRO 5487

1. LEAD STORY IN GUMHURIYYA APRIL 27 DEALS WITH ALLEGED ABORTIVE COUP AGAINST REGIME OF SYRIAN PRESIDENT ASAD, WHICH SUPPOSEDLY OCCURRED RECENTLY. QUOTING "ARAB AND PALESTINIAN SOURCES," GUMHURIYYA ARAB AFFAIRS EDITOR REPORTS ARRESTS OF "LARGE NUMBER" OF SENIOR SYRIAN MILITARY OFFICERS AND 4,000 BA'ATH PARTY CADRES IN WAKE OF UNSUCCESSFUL COUP MOVEMENT, WHICH REPORTEDLY GOT UNDERWAY IN LATE MARCH 1976, AS SYRIAN MILITARY INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANON DEEPENED. GUMHURIYYA DOES NOT STATE THAT ACTUAL COUP ATTEMPT IN FACT MOUNTED, HINTING RATHER THAT WIDE-SCALE PLOTTING HAD BEEN UNCOVERED BY SYRIAN AUTHORITIES.

2. GUMHURIYYA ALLEGES THAT REASONS FOR COUP PLOTTING

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THREE-FOLD: (A) MUTINY OF SUNNI BA'ATHIST CADRES AGAINST

PREDOMINANTLY 'ALAWITE LEADERSHIP, (B) REVULSION OF SYRIAN "NATIONALIST FORCES" AGAINST ASAD'S COLLUSION IN LEBANON WITH MARONITE FORCES, AND (C) DISSATISFACTION WITH ASAD'S POLICY OF RAPPROACHMENT WITH JORDAN'S KING HUSAIN, WHICH IS DESCRIBED IN GUMHURIYYA ARTICLE AS AGAINST INTERESTS OF PALESTINIAN REVOLUTION.

3. QUOTING "RESPONSIBLE ARAB SOURCES," GUMHURIYYA ARTICLE CONCLUDES THAT PRESIDENT ASAD WILL INSTITUTE MILITARY RESHUFFLE AND INTRODUCE NEW ARAB POLICY IN WAKE OF DISCOVERY OF COUP PLOTTING. PRIMARY TARGET OF MILITARY RESHUFFLE, ACCORDING TO GUMHURIYYA VERSION, TO BE SA'IQA ORGANIZATION AND ZUHAYR MUSHIN, WHO IS TO BE BLAMED FOR SYRIAN MILITARY ACTION IN LEBANON, AND WILL BE REPLACED. ON POLITICAL SIDE, GUMHURIYYA CLAIMS THAT FONMIN KHADDAM, WHO PRIMARY ARCHITECT OF SYRIAN LEBANESE POLICY, TO BE RELIEVED BY ASAD AND MADE SCAPEGOAT FOR FAILURE OF SYRIAN DESIGNS IN LEBANON. NEW SYRIAN "ARAB POLICY" SUPPOSEDLY WILL BE MUCH MORE PRO-PLO.

4. COMMENT: STORY OF SYRIAN COUP ATTEMPT, WHICH RUNS EXCLUSIVELY IN GUMHURIYYA, MAY BE ATTEMPT TO TAKE STORIES OF WIDE-SPREAD ARRESTS (SUCH AS REPORTED REFTEL) TO LOGICAL CONCLUSION. AT ANY RATE, TRUE OR NOT, GUMHURIYYA ARTICLE CONTAINS VIRTUAL CATALOGUE OF EGYPTIAN WISHFUL THINKING VIS-VIS SYRIA: REPUDIATION OF SYRIAN EFFORTS IN LEBANON, DISARRAY WITHIN SA'IQA ORGANIZATION, INSTABILITY OF ASAD REGIME (GUMHURIYAA MENTIONS ANTI-'ALAWITE RIOTS IN HAMA), SACKING OF 'ABD AL-HALIM KHADDAM, AND WIDE-SCALE OPPOSITION TO SYRIAN FLIRTATION WITH JORDAN. FROM GOE POINT OF VIEW, GUMHURIYYA STORY ALMOST TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE, ALTHOUGH EGYPTIANS DO NOT WISH TO SEE DEMISE OF ASAD, BUT RATHER A REPUDIATION OF HIS LEBANESE/ARAB PLICIES. AS FOR REPORTED DEMISE OF FONMIN KHADDAM (WHICH EGYPTIANS WOULD DEARLY LIKE TO SEE), SOME LOCAL DIPLOMATS HAVE NOTED FACT THAT KHADDAM ATTENDED AFRO-ARAB FOREIGN MINISTERS' CONFERENCE IN DAKAR RECENTLY RATHER THAN TENDING SYRIAN INTERESTS IN LEBANON (WHICH INTERPRETED TO MEAN KHADDAM ON SKIDS), BUT GUMHURIYYA ARTICLE FIRST COMMENT IN EGYPTIAN PRESS THAT KHADDAM ON SHAKY GROUND.

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